

# Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

## Lesson 41

### *Prayer – Living In Intimate Fellowship With God*

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When we stand in God's presence to get His view, prayer takes on new meaning in our personal lives.

*Psalm 16:11 (Amplified Bible) – You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy, at Your right hand there are pleasures forevermore.*

When David found the pathway to life, he knew he didn't have to search any further. His loyalty to the Lord brought contentment that he couldn't find anywhere else. Because God had caused him to *know* the path of life, he was looking forward to *experiencing* even more joy in God's Presence. David knew that even death could not interrupt the marvelous fellowship he had with the Lord.

Take a few minutes to consider what kind of relationship you have with God. Is it hot, cold, or lukewarm? Are you passionately seeking a personal relationship with the Lord or are you trying to avoid Him? Maybe it is an on again, off again relationship. No matter what is happening in our lives right now, God is showing up – *revealing* Himself. Will we acknowledge Him and receive His message?

A man related a story recently that got my attention. He told how God used a dog he once owned to get across a message about his own life. This man's dog had been beaten with a chain and severely mistreated by his previous owner. Because of maltreatment, the dog turned out to be a good watchdog for his mom. All day long the dog would run back and forth along the fence in the front yard, snarling and barking at the people who passed by on the street. They didn't dare come into *his* yard! They would run the risk of being ripped to pieces! No question, the dog appeared meaner than a junkyard dog – on the outside!

But on the inside, the dog was entirely different. Though he received a lot of tender loving care from his new owner, the dog was extremely shy and very much afraid of him. When his owner came through the back gate at night, the dog would get within 5 or 10 feet of him and then would lie down on his side, whimpering and slowly wagging his tail at the same time. The dog, ever so cautiously, would inch his

way toward his owner, whimpering – wanting to be petted, yet afraid to run right up to him.

One day the owner got tired of his dog not returning his affection. He wanted very much for his love to be returned. When he got home that night and his dog started going through the same old routine of lying on his side, cowering and whimpering – inching his way towards him, these words came rolling out, "*Why can't you be like other dogs? When you see me coming, why don't you run up, put your paws on me and lick me in the face and act like you love me? You act like you are afraid of me. People are going to get the wrong impression and think that I beat you!*"

As he was saying this, the Spirit of God suddenly broke in and interrupted this man's thoughts, "*Now you know how I feel! The way your dog is acting is exactly how you treat me! You stand afar off, whine and act like you are afraid to come into my presence! For once I would like for you to come near to me and act like I love you!*"

God's words cut him to the heart. His words directly speak of the type of relationship so many people have with Him. We want God to lavish His love on us, yet we are *afraid* to get close enough to Him to experience, let alone return that love. That is why James counsels us,

*James 4:8 (KJV) – "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you..."*

God's nature hasn't changed. He is waiting for us with open arms. But, we must do our part and get close enough to make the connection with God, to experience all He has for us.

*Hebrews 4:16 (KJV) – Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

God is not pleased with distant relationships. He wants more of us. God's heart felt desire is that we spend our days in intimate fellowship with Him. That is what prayer should be all about. Prayer should be living openly in front of God, continually interacting with Him; enjoying His presence without fear. That

is how Jesus lived his earthly life. He didn't have to *try* to get God's attention; He was *already* intimately connected with Him.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus' disciples were so anxious for Him to teach them about prayer? After all, they had grown up hearing others pray. From their childhood they had been trained in prayer. Yet, there was something *different* about the way Jesus prayed. When they heard Jesus pray, they were touched to the very core of their being. Why? When Jesus approached His Heavenly Father, it was not out of a sense of desperation, but out of a sense of calm familiarity. He knew Him – trusted Him! He was one in purpose with Him! That's where we should want to be!

Through the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught His disciples the *basic principles* of life in the Kingdom of God. It was never intended to be a canned prayer. Jesus went on to teach them *how to implement* those principles. Jesus demonstrated through the following parable, how He expects the Lord's Prayer to be put into practice in our every day lives.

**Luke 11:5-10 (KJV)** – *And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him. And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*

This parable, though often misunderstood and misrepresented, is really a parable of contrast. In this parable, Jesus is not saying that God is like this grouchy neighbor that you have to beat on his door to get his attention. Nor, that if you persist in beating on the door long enough, he will finally get sick and tired of the disturbance and give you what you want. That is not the nature of God. God will not be coerced (pressured) into giving us whatever we want (good or bad), no matter how hard or loud we knock.

What lesson is Jesus really teaching in this parable? That God the Father is always awake to our needs, for He never sleeps, nor does He get impatient or irritable with us. We are not bothering Him. Brothers and sisters, God wants to hear from us!

When Jesus says, "*keep on asking...keep on seeking...keep on knocking*", what He really is saying is – **keep on communicating with God!** Don't go to God only in your midnight emergencies! Stay close to Him. Keep in constant communion with Him. Jesus called this closeness, "*abiding*" in John 15:4. And Paul exhorts us to "*pray without ceasing*" in I Thessalonians 5:17.

When we learn to live in intimate fellowship with God, our whole life is spent in an attitude of prayer. When we learn to trust our Heavenly Father as Jesus did, then God can trust us with the answers to our prayers, "*Thy will be done*".

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#### Questions for personal or group study:

1. God revealed to the owner of the dog, that many people are afraid to get close to Him. How can we break this cycle of fear and get closer to God? See: Matthew 11:28-30; James 4:8; Hebrews 4:16; John 7:37-38
2. Why were Jesus' disciples so anxious for Him to teach them about prayer?
3. God wants us to spend our days in intimate fellowship with Him. How does this change our view of prayer? See: John 15:4-8, John 17:20-23 and I Thessalonians 5:17
4. The Lord's Prayer teaches us the basic principles of life in the Kingdom of God. How did Jesus say we can implement those principles and put them into daily practice? See: Luke 11:5-13
5. In the parable Jesus relays in Luke 11:5-10, we learn the real meaning of the parable. God is not like the grouchy neighbor. Rather, He loves us and wants to hear from us! When Jesus says, "*keep on asking...keep on seeking...keep on knocking...*" what is He really saying to us?